# critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

## Fall Drama Prospects

Jezebel's Husband, new play by Robert Nathan which will be produced by Roger Stevens, William Fields and Hume Cronyn, now in rehearsal under direction of Sherman Marks. Five week summer tryout tour starts August 4th at Pocono, Pa, Playhouse. Cast includes Claude Rains, Claudia Morgan and Carmen Matthews. Scheduled for Broadway after elections.

## Summer Tryouts

Peter Frost, new comedy by Nicholas Cosentino tried out at Spring Lake, NY, Playhouse, simply was not worth the fine production given it, sighs Rice, Post. Script, if read before literate, unbiased, theatre-minded group would have revealed flaws at once, saving disaster to all concerned. Vern, Variety, tabbed show as good try for warm weather fare, but not for Broadway...Here's Mama, new comedy by Frank Gabrielson based on TV "Mama" series started summer tour at Ogunquit, Maine, Playhouse. Production starring Peggy Wood and rest of CBS-TV troupe is near perfect, but Don, Variety, fears subject has been used too many times.

## Hits Revisited

McClain, Journal American, and Sheaffer, Eagle, join colleagues in okaying Celeste Holm in The King and I. Holm is replacing Gertrude Lawrence during latter's summer vacation. Age and personality make Holm play romance angle more in script, Sheaffer, Eagle, points out. Critic thinks Yul Brynner is better now than when show opened, he has utilized the time to perfect his characterization. McClain agrees that entire show seems better than before.

## Strawhat Visits - Producers Week

Do summer theatre producers have to be young, charming couples to be successful, asks Leon Pearson. After visiting with Mr. & Mrs. John Lane at Ogunquit, Me; Mr. & Mrs. Phillip Barry at Southampton, LI; and Mr. & Mrs. Ron Ronson, Westhampton, LI, broadcaster concludes that they do well because they integrate themselves with their community more readily than typical Broadway producer...Favorite summer theatre operators of Sylvester, News, are Edward N. Rugoff and Herman Becker, who own and operate Brighton Beach Theatre. Good shows and fine air conditioning system are keys to profitable season.

## Best of Season

Current revival of The Male Animal is more pertinent and amusing than original 1940 production, comments "C.H." Nation. Events since have sharpened the contrast between what is funny in play and what is not, giving top notch comedy added depth. This type of play has been sorely missed in recent seasons.

## News & Notes

I Am A Camera and Paint Your Wagon, both of which "suspended," have cancelled plans to return to Broadway; both plan fall tours...Point of No Return reopens August 4th...Mrs. McThing returns in September after month at Central City, Colo...Alice Ghostley, New Faces, doubles at Bon Soir...Vivian Blaine returned to Guys and Dolls.

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## ' Cumulative NYC Ratings '

D - Daily W - Weekly M - Monthly B - Broadcast

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|---|---|---|
| DT - NY Times | DJC - Journal of Commerce | WCM - Chr. Science Monitor |
| DH - NY Herald Tribune | DWJ - Wall Street Journal | WC - Commonweal |
| DN - NY News | DWW - Women's Wear | WCU - Cue |
| DM - NY Mirror | WB - Billboard | WN - Nation |
| DC - NY Compass | WV - Variety | WNR - New Republic |
| DP - NY Post | WCD - Critical Digest | WNS - Newsweek |
| DJ - NY Journal American | WGN - George Jean Nathan | WNY - New Yorker |
| DW - NY World Tele-Sun | WWM - Ward Morehouse | WSR - Saturday Review |
| DB - Brooklyn Eagle | BC - WCBS Bill Leonard | WT - Time |
| DL - L.I.Press | BL - New Leader-WEVD | MP - Park East |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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| THE FOUR POSTER-10/24/51 | PROS: 19 | CON: DH DP WGM WWM BL WC WNY<br>NONE: DWJ WN WNR WSR |
| GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50 | PROS: 29 | CON: WN |
| THE KING AND I-3/29/51 | PROS: 29 | CON: WN |
| THE MALE ANIMAL-4/30/52 | PROS: 27 | NONE: WGN MP WNR |
| THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51 | PROS: 26 | CON: WCD WGN NONE: WN MP |
| MRS. McTHING-2/20/52 | PROS: 20 | CON: DM DJ BC BL WNR WT WGN NONE: WNR MP |
| PAL JOEY-1/3/52 | PROS: 28 | CON: BL NONE: WNR |
| NEW FACES OF 1952-5/16/52 | PROS: 25 | CON: DP WT WGN NONE: WN WNR |
| A NIGHT IN VENICE-6/26/52 | PROS: 20 | CON: DC WSR NONE: WGN WNR BC WT MP |
| POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51 | PROS: 25 | CON: DW BL WN WNR WT |
| SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49 | PROS: 29 | CON: WT |
| TOP BANANA-11/1/51 | PROS: 23 | CON: DP DJ BL NONE: WCM WN WWR WSR |
| WISH YOU WERE HERE-6/25/52 | PROS: DN DC DB DL DJC WV BL<br>CON: DT DH DM DP DJ DW DWJ WB WWM WC WCU WNS WNY WSR WT<br>NONE: DWW WCD WGN BC WCM WN WNR MP | |

## ' US-British Actors' Equity Dispute '

Promotion of more jobs for more American actors being a prime purpose of US Actors' Equity Association, the union rejected Roger Stevens' application to bring English company of The Trial of Mr. Pickwick to NY for a Playwrights Company production this fall. The producer was advised that there is a large pool of resident Equity members, formerly of British nationality, which he could use for his production.

Stevens disagreed with union standpoint, arguing that Stanley Young play done in London in May depends on authentic British actors being the "bone and tissue" of the script. He doubted if he could cast play from ranks of Lambs.

US actors now working in London are naturally perturbed by the new Equity ruling limiting employment of alien actors. Katharine Hepburn, Mary Martin, Maurice Evans, and Boris Karloff sent a message to Actors Equity in NY, Fowle, Times, reports, urging their union to reconsider stand. British Equity warned that unless US rules were withdrawn, it would consider counter measures which would take effect August 16th. Times reports from unnamed sources that Actors Equity is prepared to modify its position on The Trial of Mr. Pickwick if company arrives before August 16th.

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' Green Room Department '

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LATE CURTAINS...Theatre should try 9:30 PM curtain for those who like to have dinner at midnight and then carry on till dawn, suggests Chapman, News. Critic is ready to bet a used Taft button that the late curtain audience would be smarter, more enthusiastic and more profitable than the crackers and milk and lawn mower set now showing up for the once weekly 7:00 PM curtain.

COLUMN TIPS..."Show of Month" to picket Shubert shows next season, reports Gardner... Broadway show due in fall had to turn down $50,000 from a prospective angel, because dough was black market, whispers Wilson...Some of chorus at Wish You Were Here given notices, says Kilgallen.

CLEAN LIVING...NY Drama critics lead such clean lives that the thought of adultery, subject of many French plays, upsets them, Lawrence Langer, Theatre Guild, told Buchwald, Paris Herald Tribune. Watts, Post, was surprised that the drama executive realized this important fact about critics. Reviewer wondered if answer perhaps might not be free trips to flesh pots of Europe. Sacrifice of clean living for good purpose would be characteristics of colleagues, he hinted.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Expansion of Negro theatre and new opportunities in TV and films for Negro actors hoped for by Sylvester, News...Summer theatre must grow up and realize its mistakes in presenting slap-happy amateur productions, complains Armstrong, Variety...Attempts to prove Shakespeare really an Irishman show how far so-called scholarship will go to prove a theory, points out Burr, Playbill.

LONDON REPORT...Katharine Hepburn's success in The Millionairess is well deserved, comments Watts, Post. Though script is one of Shaw's worst, the star believes it is an excellent comedy and plays it accordingly. British production is triumph of her dynamic and individualistic personality.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Diverse theatre plans of Walter Chrysler, New Faces backer, detailed to Hawkins, WT&S. Entertainment Management Corp. will act as personal managers for clients. Chrysler and Leonard Sillman planning revival of Ziegfeld Follies next season, an exchange of plays with London, and perhaps a swank night club...Theatre is the only pure form of entertainment left, Jack Carter, Top Banana, told Rice, Post...Robert Moses, New York State Park Commissioner, nominated for president by Mike Todd, Sheaffer, Eagle, reports.

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' Theatre News Roundup '

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Guys and Dolls played 700th performance...The Chekhovians, group of actors who have played in Russian dramas held annual meeting...Palace to return to two-a-day vaudeville in October...Robert Alda leaves Guys and Dolls September 24th to help produce Herald Square...Eighty scenic artists working on five fall productions have ended strike while wage talks continue...Midnight shows of "Cypress Gardens Water Show" being played at Jones Beach Marine Stadium after performances of A Night In Venice...Watts, Post, returned from European trip...Chapman, News, lectured at Lake Tarleton, NH, Festival of Seven Arts...Tabloid Peep Show to continue at Holiday until mid-August...International Theatre Institute to hold two day conference on present conditions of dramatic arts throughout the world in Venice on September 19 and 20th... National Conference of Christians and Jews named Actors Equity for National Brotherhood Award for leadership in victory against segregation at National Theatre in Washington.

' Digests of Famous Hits - Rio Rita '

Seven new theatres were built in New York in 1927, and two debuted in February. Twin premiere of lavish new Ziegfeld theatre and Ziegfeld's latest spectacle, Rio Rita, awed the first night critics. Fifty-seven shows were then current on Broadway. The list includes Abie's Irish Rose, Broadway, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, The Constant Wife, The Play's the Thing, Silver Cord, Saturday's Children and the famed long run The Ladder. Thirty of the 57 were selling "outrate" tickets. Variety adds fascinating bit of information that the NY District Attorney was just about to close up nine "dirt" plays then running. Titles of the latter included The Captive, Sex and Virgin Man. Seats to musicals averaged $5.50 though Rio Rita ran at $5 top, while most plays sold tickets at $3.30 top.

Rio Rita, a musical comedy staged and produced by Florenz Ziegfeld, had music and lyrics by Harry Tierney and Joseph McCarthy and book by Guy Bolton and Fred Thompson. Original cast of show, which has become favorite of summer audiences featured Ethelind Terry, J. Harold Murray, Alf P. James and Vincent Serrano. Featured players who were turned into stars as a result of this show included Ada May, Robert Woollsey and Bert Wheeler. Settings were by designer of the new theatre, Joseph Urban, while orchestra was led by Oscar Bradley. Urban's mural of "Joy of Life" took over one year to paint.

Critics were awed by lavish theatre, costumes and sets. Most granted that book and music would win no prizes for originality, but complete showmanship of Ziegfeld in all departments made show one to remember. Chorus and ballet of 100 beauties impressed the reviewers. Hammond, Tribune, rated it a night of jubilee for everyone. He advised commuters to stay till end, even if they must miss their train. Atkinson, Times, found it a thoroughly enjoyable evening after the first night antics had died down. For sheer extravagances of beauty, show has no equal, he commented. As for the Urban murals, the Times appraiser, who then signed his reviews "J. Brooks Atkinson," warned Ziegfeld his shows would have to be superb to compete with the carnival of beauty on the walls.

Woollcott, World, joined others in praising comedy talents of May, Wheeler and Woollsey, singing talents of Terry and Murray. Likewise his chief adjectives were saved for the lavish production. American reviewer found Ziegfeld made Mexico so charming in production, that he expected exodus south of border. Ibee, Variety, predicted title song would be a hit, though he was slightly worried that new theatre was 400 yards "off Broadway." Leland, Billboard, named house as most perfect theatre in New York, and show one of finest ever seen on Broadway.

' Legit Stuff '

Gertrude Lawrence, vacationing from The King and I, named Guest Professor of Dramatic Arts at Columbia University...Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn plan 35 week road tour of The Fourposter...Carol Hendricks returned to Top Banana...Dorothy Blackburn replaced Ruth McDevitt in The Male Animal...Council of Living Theatre and Theatre Guild subscription campaign started in Milwaukee.

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